

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 01427

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, UK, GJ

SUBJECT: LORD BALNIEL'S COMMENTS ON GRENADAN
INDEPENDENCE

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED: LORD BALNIEL, MINISTER OF STATE AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE, WAS SHARPLY QUESTIONED ON BBC RADIO EVENING JANUARY 30 REGARDING HMG POLICY ON GRENADA'S INDEPENDENCE. HE TOOK AN UNCOMPROMISING LINE ON ANY MODIFICATION OF CURRENT BRITISH POLICY. AT END OF INTERVIEW HE WAS ASKED WHETHER THERE WERE ANY CONCEIVABLE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH WOULD IMPEL BRITISH TO WITHDRAW OR POSTPONE INDEPENDENCE AGREEMENT. BALNIEL RESPONDED TO THE EFFECT THAT THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS HAD BEEN COMPLETED AND THAT GRENADA WOULD BECOME INDEPENDENT ON FEBRUARY 7.

2. AT ONE POINT THE INTERVIEWER MADE REFERENCE TO A SERIOUS BREAKDOWN IN SECURITY ON THE ISLAND. BALNIEL RESPONDED BY SAYING THAT HE HOPED THE CURRENT TREND TOWARD A REDUCTION IN THE VIOLENCE AND UNREST WOULD CONTINUE. NEWS REPORTS, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN PAINTING A PICTURE OF INCREASING CHAOS IN GRENADA AND RAISING THE POSSIBILITY THAT BRITISH POPULATION WOULD HAVE TO BE
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EVACUATED.

3. BALNIEL ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT HMG REGARDED THE 1972 ELECTION AS A CLEAR MANDATE FOR INDEPENDENCE. WHEN IT WAS POINTED OUT THAT GAIRY'S PARTY RECEIVED LESS THAN 60 PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE, WHEREAS IN A REFERENDUM A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY IN FAVOR OF INDEPENDENCE WOULD BE NEEDED, BALNIEL SAID THAT THE REFERENDUM PROVISION HAD BEEN INCORPORATED IN THE WIAS ONLY AS AN INSURANCE MEASURE IN CASE THE MAJORITY OF THE INHABITANTS OF AN ASSOCIATED STATE WERE UNABLE TO EXPRESS THEIR WILL THROUGH NORMAL CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS. THE 1972 ELECTION RESULTS WHICH GAVE GAIRY'S SUPPORTERS AN OVERWHELMING PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY WERE ACCEPTED BY HMG AS THE NORMAL WAY FOR AN ASSOCIATED STATE TO EXPRESS ITS DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENCE. WHEN ASKED IF HE THOUGHT PRIME MINISTER GAIRY HAD THE APPROPRIATE QUALITIES TO LEAD AN INDEPENDENT GRENADA, BALNIEL SAID THAT IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR HIM TO COMMENT ON THE PERSONALITIES INVOLVED IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS.

4. EARLIER IN THE DAY, BALNIEL HAD ANNOUNCED IN HOUSE OF COMMONS THAT PRINCE RICHARD OF GLOUCESTER WOULD NOT BE ATTENDING THE GRENADA INDEPENDENCE CEREMONIES. IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION ABOUT POSSIBLE EVACUATION OF BRITISH RESIDENTS HE STATED THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS REPORTED OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS AND THAT THERE ARE NO THREATS TO MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH COMMUNITY IN GRENADA. HE DID, HOWEVER, SAY THAT THERE WERE CONTINGENCY ARRANGEMENTS TO INSURE THE WELL-BEING OF BRITONS ON THE ISLAND OF GRENADA AS THERE ARE FOR BRITISH CITIZENS EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD. END UNCLAS

5. COMMENT: (BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL) SITUATION IN GRENADA PRESENTS SERIOUS DILEMMA FOR BRITISH. BUT THEY HAVE CLEARLY DECIDED THAT WITHDRAWAL OF INDEPENDENCE PLEDGE AT THIS POINT WOULD CREATE MORE PROBLEMS FOR THEM IN THE CARIBBEAN REGION THAN GOING AHEAD AND ALLOWING GRENADA TO FIND ITS OWN WAY OUT OF THE CHAOS. BALNIEL SHUT THE DOOR ON A POSSIBLE LAST MINUTE CHANGE IN THIS POLICY ABOUT AS HARD AS COULD BE DONE. ABOUT ONLY DEVELOPMENT WE CAN ENVISAGE WHICH MIGHT ALTER CURRENT CONFIDENTIAL

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PICTURE WOULD BE AN APPEAL FROM CARIBBEAN COMMONWEALTH LEADERS FOR A POSTPONEMENT OF GRENADA'S INDEPENDENCE, A POSSIBILITY WHICH APPEARS TO BE EXTREMELY REMOTE. THERE SHOULD BE AN AUDIBLE SIGH OF RELIEF FROM WHITEHALL WHEN, AS IS NOW ASSUMED, GRENADA STAGGERS TO INDEPENDENCE ON FEBRUARY 7.

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